



THE PROTECTOR

WANDA &
BRUNSTETTER



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Our mission is to inspire the world with the life-changing message of the Bible.



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DEDICATION

To all the people I have met during several visits to the Big Valley in Mifflin County, Pennsylvania, who helped me understand the uniqueness of those special Amish families who live and work there.

*“Honor your father and mother,”
which is the first commandment with promise.*

EPHESIANS 6:2 NKJV



PROLOGUE

Belleville, Pennsylvania

HAVE YOU SEEN ROSA ANYWHERE?" Norman Petersheim's mother asked when Norman entered the kitchen Saturday morning, with the hope that breakfast would be ready.

"No, I haven't. Has my sister gone missing?" He chuckled and grabbed an apple from the fruit bowl in the center of the table.

Mom's forehead wrinkled, and her stern blue eyes pierced Norman like icicles. "This is not a laughing matter, Son. Rosa didn't answer when I knocked on her bedroom door, and when I peeked inside, she wasn't there. Rosa's bed was neatly made, which seemed odd because she rarely makes her bed before leaving for work. Usually I make it for her." His mother's shoulders rose, and with a huff she added, "Like all my children, that young woman has her good points, but she can also be undependable at times. Yesterday, she promised that she would get up early this morning and help me make a batch of blueberry pancakes." Mom made a sweeping gesture of the room. "But as you can see, she is not here to make good on her word."

"Maybe she's in the *baadschtubb*." Norman bit into the crimson skin of the apple. The sweet juice enticed him to take another bite.

"I checked both the upstairs and downstairs bathrooms, but she wasn't in either one. In fact, the upstairs bathroom was empty, and your *daed* is currently using the one downstairs."

“Did you knock on Susan and Tena’s door? Rosa could be in their room, talking to them about her date with Ephraim last night.”

“I did check with them, and they both said they hadn’t seen their sister since Ephraim came by to pick her up last evening. I also looked in the basement, and when your daed came in earlier from doing his chores, he said Rosa was not in the barn.” Her brows pulled downward. “I wonder if she may have gotten up before I did and left for work already.”

When the apple core was all that was left, Norman strolled over to the waste bin, plopped it in, and gave his lone suspender a quick snap. “Don’t see why she would do that. In the warmer months like we’re having now, Rosa always walks with me and Dad over to the Meat and Cheese store, and she never goes in early.” He grabbed a paper towel and wiped his hands. “Fact is, she doesn’t even like working in the store, so I’m sure she wouldn’t be eager to get there.”

“I don’t know. . . I just thought. . .” Mom thumped her forehead. “Yesterday, I heard Rosa say that she and Ephraim would be getting together with a bunch of his friends from Allensville. We know Rosa’s boyfriend hasn’t joined the church and is kind of wild, as are the young people he hangs out with. Your daed and I aren’t happy about Rosa spending so much time with him, but she’s a grown woman, and we have no control over who she sees or what she does when she is not here.” Mom rubbed her cheeks. “Do you think maybe she never came home at all and went to one of those young people’s homes to spend the night?”

“I hate to admit it, but that same thought had crossed my mind.” Norman tossed the paper towel in the garbage can under the sink.

Mom slapped both hands against her reddening cheeks. “I wish Rosa wouldn’t hang around Ephraim or his rowdy friends. None of them have joined the church either, and if she keeps going out with them and doing things she should not, she might never settle down

and become a member of our church.”

“Are you talking about Rosa?” Norman’s sister Susan asked as she joined them in the kitchen.

“*Jab.*” Mom gestured to Norman. “I can’t find Rosa, and your brother and I think she might not have come home last night.”

“Seriously?” Susan’s hair hadn’t been put up in a bun yet, and long blond strands draped her shoulders as she tipped her head to one side. Her hair appeared lighter than usual this morning, most likely due to the hot, intense July sun bleaching it out. “When you asked earlier if she was in the room Tena and I share, I figured you would find her somewhere else in the house.”

“No, I haven’t, and from the looks of her bed that is still made, I’d say she wasn’t in it all night.” Mom lifted her gaze to the ceiling and groaned. “As much as I love Rosa, that girl is going to be the death of me yet.”

Norman stepped forward and placed both hands on his mother’s slumped shoulders. “Don’t talk like that, Mom. Rosa’s just going through a rebellious phase right now. Once she settles down and joins the church, you’ll forget all about the worry and stress she’s put you and Dad through the last couple of years.”

His mother gave a slow shake of her head. “*Ich zweifel eb sell wahr is.*”

“What do you doubt is true, Mom?” Susan questioned. “That you’ll forget about the stress your oldest daughter has caused you, or that Rosa will join the church?”

“Both. Your sister has given us no indication that she has any desire to become a church member, and that’s a concern.”

“Never say *never*, Mom.” Norman gave his mother’s shoulder a gentle squeeze before moving toward the back door.

“Where are you going, Son?” she called.

“Out to the phone shed. I’m gonna call the Peights’ house and

leave a message. If Rosa is still with Ephraim, maybe someone in his family is aware of their whereabouts. She could even be at his home. One thing's for sure—since Ephraim took Rosa out last night, he must know where she is right now.” He pulled the back door open and stepped outside.

Norman paused on the porch and drew in a few deep breaths to relieve the apprehension he felt. Although Rosa had always been headstrong and sometimes a bit flighty, to his knowledge she'd never stayed out all night.

If Rosa shows up here sometime today with a bunch of excuses or even an apology for not coming home last night, she'll no doubt be in for a strong tongue-lashing from our father. Norman shook his head. Maybe my inconsiderate sister decided to push the envelope further this time, but regardless, she'll have to return home at some point and deal with whatever Dad or Mom says to her.

Norman's father was a bishop in their church district, and it didn't look good for a bishop's child, even a grown one, to go around at all hours of the night and not come home until the next day. If word got out, people in their community would be bound to hear about it, and that would lead to tongues wagging and fingers being pointed in the direction of their church leader. In addition to speaking beneficial sermons and attending to the needs of the church members, each preacher was supposed to set a good example for the people, which included keeping his family in line. Rosa might not care about embarrassing her father and mother, but Norman sure did. He'd always tried to honor his parents, and even before joining the church, he had made an effort to refrain from doing anything that might humiliate Mom or Dad.

Norman's thoughts came to a halt, and he tipped his head to listen to a mourning dove that had landed on the roof. When the bird ceased its cooing, he stepped off the porch and sprinted down the driveway to the phone shed. As Norman swung open the shed door, he was

greeted by a burst of contained heat that magnified through the only window in the small building. After stepping inside, he noticed that the red light on the answering machine was blinking. Norman decided to check the messages before making his call, with the hope that Rosa may have left them a message.

Norman punched the button and was surprised to hear Ephraim's voice. "Hello. This is Ephraim Peight calling, and my message is for Rosa." There was a pause, and what sounded like heavy breathing. Then Ephraim continued. "I'm sorry for the things I said to you last night, Rosa, and I wish you had waited for me to take you home instead of storming off into the night. I hope you made it home okay. Please give me a call when you get this message."

Sweat poured off Norman's forehead and dripped down his face. Panic gripped him, and he clutched the phone's base. *If Ephraim didn't bring Rosa home last night and she's not here, where is she? A multitude of disconcerting thoughts swirled in Norman's head. Did my sister start making her way home on foot last night from Allensville? Did she get a ride from someone? Could something bad have happened to her along the way?*

He bowed his head and shut his eyes. *Dear Lord, please help us. If something has happened to Rosa, we need to find her right away!*



CHAPTER 1

Three months later

AFTER RETURNING HOME FROM ANOTHER boring day at his father's Meat and Cheese store, Norman entered the barn and stopped inside the double doors. The air smelled of fresh straw and oats, and he wondered if his twelve-year-old brother, Alvin, had brought the horses back in from the field, where Norman had put them before leaving for work this morning. Sometimes Alvin got sidetracked and didn't do as he was told, which Norman hoped was not the case today.

He tipped his head. Apparently, Alvin had brought them in, because snorting and hoof clomping echoed down the corridor leading to the horses' stalls. Norman would eventually check on his own horse, Rusty, but right now he wanted to be alone and spend some time with his thoughts.

With fingers clenched tightly into his palms, he paced from one end of the rustic wooden building to the other. After all this time since his sister's disappearance, nothing had been resolved. There'd been a thorough investigation with numerous questions asked, but they were no closer to finding out what had happened to Rosa than they had been the first day she'd disappeared. Norman's parents had contacted the sheriff as soon as they knew something wasn't right about her disappearance. Everyone in the family had been questioned several times. All her friends had been investigated too, but no one

had offered anything of value. Officials had scoured the area where Rosa had last been seen, looking for any clues as to what might have happened to her. They'd found nothing, and the only thing they had learned was that the last time anyone had seen Rosa was at the young people's gathering she'd gone to with Ephraim. It seemed like they had met a dead end, with no answers in sight. Norman's poor mother had shed so many tears while struggling to provide the authorities with a description of her twenty-year-old daughter. With no pictures of Rosa to show, all her parents could offer was her name, age, height, weight, and the fact that her hair and eyes were brown.

Norman pondered on the fact that his sister had not joined the Amish church, and even with the pressure she'd received from their father, she'd insisted that she wasn't ready to make a commitment or acknowledgment of her faith in God.

Rosa never liked anyone telling her what to do or pushing her to do something she wasn't ready for, and now it's doubtful that we'll ever see her again. Norman swatted both sides of his face. *I need to stop thinking about Rosa as though she's dead and never coming back.* He crossed his arms over his chest. *I need to tell myself daily that she left of her own accord and will return someday with a heartfelt apology and an explanation of where she's been and why she left.*

Norman stopped pacing and leaned against the outside of his horse's stall for support. He'd had a hard time keeping his mind on work or anything else since Rosa's disappearance. The fact that she'd gone missing and hadn't been found haunted him day and night. Even after this much time had passed, he continued to struggle with anxiety, thinking about his sister and wondering what could have happened to her. What reason would Rosa have had for running away from home? So many questions, yet no answers.

He reflected more on Rosa and her outstanding personality traits, both negative and positive. She had always been the outgoing,

competitive type, and sometimes became overly emotional about things. Rosa was independent and the closest sibling to Norman's age, which had given them a bond that had strengthened because they were both quite athletic and loved spending time in the great outdoors. With Norman being four years older than Rosa, however, even at a young age he'd felt responsible for her and seen himself as his sister's protector.

Norman swiped a hand across his clean-shaven chin, remembering how Rosa had loved playing volleyball and always wanted to be on the winning team. Norman missed seeing the determined set of his sister's jaw and the way her brown eyes darkened whenever it was her turn to serve the ball. No one he knew, not even the young men who often joined their games of volleyball at social functions, took the game as seriously as Rosa.

Rosa's life wasn't always about winning, though. She used to enjoy spending time with Ada Detweiler. Those two had been good friends since Ada's folks moved from Lancaster County to Mifflin County when Ada was in the third grade. Although the young women had several things in common, like their enjoyment of cooking, reading, and playing volleyball, Ada seemed more settled and had recently joined the church. Norman had figured when Ada joined, Rosa would too, but she didn't budge on her decision, stating determinedly that she wished to remain free and enjoy her running-around years for as long as possible.

If Rosa left of her own accord, then out of all the people she knew, Ada ought to know where Rosa ran off to, yet Ada denies knowing anything. Could she be hiding the truth from us for the benefit of Rosa? Norman hammered a fist against his knee. There must be someone she would have confided in, and if anyone knew where Rosa went, it would be Ada. Then again, what if she'd been kidnapped and taken somewhere against her will? Is my sister still alive? Am I clinging to that hope when there is none? Would

Rosa's boyfriend have been capable of hurting her?

As he so often did, Norman homed in on the fact that the last time he'd seen Rosa was shortly before Ephraim picked her up for the young people's get-together in Allensville. Norman remembered seeing her sitting in a chair on the front porch, waiting for her boyfriend's horse and buggy to show up. Norman had approached Rosa and was on the verge of having a conversation when Ephraim arrived. Even now, Norman regretted that he'd never had a chance to say a word to her, because she'd hurried down the porch steps and raced out to Ephraim's black buggy without so much as a goodbye or even a wave in Norman's direction.

Norman didn't care much for Rosa's boyfriend, although Ephraim seemed to be a hard worker when it came to the job he held in his father's harness shop. From what Rosa had said, Ephraim's father paid him well. Norman figured that must be true because Rosa's boyfriend had been generous with his gifts to Rosa and didn't mind spending money on her whenever they went out for supper at one of the restaurants in the area. Even so, Ephraim had always seemed uptight and kind of moody—like he had some sort of underlying problem he'd never discussed openly—at least not with Norman. He had no way of knowing what Ephraim said to Rosa when they were alone because she'd kept pretty quiet about their relationship. Of course, Rosa had never been one to discuss her personal life with her younger siblings, and she very rarely confided in Norman. When they'd been children, she had jabbered a lot about her likes and dislikes, but as she'd approached her teen years, Rosa had kept more things to herself.

Another question that Norman had asked himself repeatedly since Rosa went missing was whether Ephraim had told the authorities the truth about his relationship with Rosa and shared everything that had happened on the night of her disappearance.

Could Ephraim be keeping the truth from our family because he's guilty

of hurting Rosa? Or maybe the two of them planned her disappearance, and Ephraim has intentions of joining her wherever she's gone. Norman felt hot, despite the coolness creeping into the barn from the October wind that had come up, making its way through one of the open windows. If Rosa was kidnapped or had been killed, why was there no evidence found to suggest such a thing?

Norman rubbed his sweaty palms down the sides of his dark trousers, held up by one lone suspender—he look worn by all men in the Byler conservative Amish group to which he and his family belonged. This and the fact that their church group drove only black-top buggies were a couple of the things that set them apart from the men in the Nebraska white-top buggy group, who wore no suspenders at all.

It wasn't good for him to mull over the details and questions about Rosa's disappearance repeatedly. Nothing was ever resolved, and the only thing it accomplished was getting Norman riled up each time he pondered the situation. Despite all of that, he couldn't seem to help himself from replaying the things he knew and wondering about the things he did not know—and maybe never would.

Is there anything more I can do to find my missing sister? he asked himself for the umpteenth time. *Did Rosa have any enemies we don't know about? Would there have been anyone who wanted to hurt her? If so, for what reason? If Rosa left home on her own, why has she made no contact with her family or friends? Are the sheriff and other authorities still trying to find Rosa, or have they given up on their search for her altogether?*

Norman felt that, as the oldest son, it was his responsibility to protect his family from further pain. He frequently wondered how he could make his parents' lives easier. He had even asked himself if he should break up with his girlfriend, Salina, so he could spend more time searching for his sister. He cared deeply for Salina and hoped she understood the reasons he couldn't see her as often as he used to. She had been supportive at first, but recently Salina seemed a bit put

out when Norman said he was too busy to see her. It seemed pretty selfish of her to expect him to give up on the search for Rosa so he could spend more time pursuing their relationship. He wondered how she would react if one of her siblings went missing and Norman wasn't understanding.

In addition to the flyers Norman and his parents had hung on bulletin boards in the area and other places, telling about Rosa's disappearance, Norman had also paid for an ad in a few of the Amish newspapers, hoping that someone would have knowledge of her and contact them. Of course, within the first few weeks after Rosa had gone missing, the local media had picked up on the story and spread the word. Even with all that, not one person had come forward with any information that would lead to finding Rosa.

Norman paused from his reminiscing and lifted his gaze to the hayloft where he and Rosa used to play and sometimes hide when they were children and didn't want anyone to find them. They'd called it their "secret place," which, of course, was childish thinking, because Dad went to the hayloft whenever he needed to get something that had been stored up there, like bales of hay and supplies that there was no room for in the lower section of the barn.

Norman's thoughts came to an abrupt halt when his sixteen-year-old sister, Tena, entered the building and headed his way. "What are you doing out here?" she asked, tipping her head back to look up at him.

"Nothing much—just thinking is all."

"Well, supper is ready, and you shouldn't keep everyone waiting."

"Okay, I'll be in shortly."

She pursed her lips and squinted her hazel eyes.

"Said I will, didn't I?"

"Jah, okay." She turned and he watched as she hurried from the barn.



Norman took a few minutes to say hello to his horse and make sure that he'd been fed and brushed. He had just started walking from the

barn when he spotted his mother coming out of the phone shed. *Oh boy. . . I hope she wasn't calling the sheriff again.* Almost every day since Rosa's disappearance, Norman's mother made a phone call to the sheriff's office to see if he or his deputy had found Rosa or had any information to share.

He halted and waited for her as she slowly approached. "I thought you were inside waiting on me for supper," Norman said when she joined him on the lawn.

Mom shook her head. "Susan and Tena are in charge of the evening meal tonight. I went to the phone shed to check for messages."

"Anything important?"

"No, not even a response from the sheriff's office about the call I made to them earlier today." Mom's hands moved jerkily as she spoke. "After three whole months, wouldn't you think they'd have some information for us by now?"

Not again, Mom. You need to quit calling authorities all the time and let them do their job. Otherwise, they're never going to find Rosa. Norman bit back the comment on the tip of his tongue. He didn't want to upset his mother any more than she already was. Instead, he placed his hand on her arm and said calmly, "Maybe it would be better if you didn't call so often. I'm sure if the sheriff had any news about Rosa, he would let us know right away. Besides, either not hearing from them at all or being told that they have no news to share only upsets you, Mom."

She heaved a sigh and gave a slow nod. "You're right, Son, but I can't stand sitting around waiting for a call that may never come. I feel like I need to be doing something."

"I understand." He clasped his mother's hand and gave her fingers a tender squeeze. "For now, let's go inside and try to have a nice supper. I'm sure the rest of the family is waiting for us at the table."

She released another sigh and followed him up the porch stairs.

If only there was something I could do to ease my distraught mother's

pain, Norman thought as they entered the house. Maybe I'll have a talk with Ephraim and Ada again soon. See if I can get some information about Rosa from at least one of them this time.



Norman took his seat at one end of the supper table. Dad sat at the other end, with Mom and Susan on one side and Tena and Alvin across from them. They'd changed things up a bit since Rosa no longer joined them for meals. Her chair, on the other side of Mom, sat empty now.

Norman remembered how one evening, about a month after Rosa's disappearance, Susan had taken Rosa's chair out of the kitchen and placed it in the laundry room. Mom had become quite upset—almost hysterical, in fact. She'd shouted at Susan and told her to put the chair back. Mom insisted that Rosa would be coming home soon, and when she did, her chair should be at the table.

Soon? Norman cringed internally. *What would they all do, especially Mom, if Rosa never returned? And even if, by some miracle, she did come home, would Dad even accept her?* Norman's father had expressed more than once that he felt sure Rosa had left of her own accord, and he'd stated emphatically that after all the time that had passed, if she should ever return, she would not be accepted. Of course, that harsh statement had made Mom weep even more, and then Dad had attempted to smooth the waters by saying that would only happen if she came home without a good excuse. It felt like they all had to tread carefully in this home for fear of saying or doing something that might upset his mother. Well, Norman figured they were all upset to some degree, but Mom seemed to be taking it harder than the rest of the family.

Guess that makes sense, Norman thought, *since Mom is the one who gave birth to Rosa and provided for most of her daughter's needs here at home, while Dad earned the money from his business to put food on the table and pay the bills.*

Dad cleared his throat and announced that it was time to pray, so

everyone bowed their heads. Norman prayed silently, thanking God for the food on the table and asking Him to bring Rosa safely home. His prayer also included his mother, asking the Lord to help calm her nerves and bring a sense of peace and joy back into their home.

Norman winced when he felt someone kick him under the table. He opened his eyes and saw Susan holding a plate out to him. “Would you like some meatloaf?” she asked. “I made it myself while Tena put the tossed green salad together.”

“Jah, I’m sure it’s *gut*.” He prodded his fork into the robust slab of meat on the platter.

“I’m real pleased with how it turned out. Do you think it’s *besser* than the kind Rosa used to make?”

Norman reached for his glass of water and took a drink. “Maybe not better, but just as good.”

Susan offered him a huge grin. “With Rosa gone, I get to cook more often now, and that pleases me.”

All heads turned to stare at her. Their mother gasped and pressed both hands against her temples. “How could you even say something like that? Don’t you care that your sister is gone and we don’t know what happened to her?” Tears sprang to Mom’s eyes and dripped onto her flushed cheeks. “I would give anything to have Rosa sitting here at the table with us right now, and you should want that too.” She pointed a shaky finger at Susan. “How can you think of yourself right now, with your sister’s chair sitting empty?”

Susan’s face turned pink. “I—I didn’t mean anything by it, Mom. I just wondered. . .” Susan pushed away from the table and fled the room. Norman heard his sister’s footsteps clomp up the stairs leading to their rooms.

Mom sniffed deeply and dried her eyes with a napkin. Tena sat in silence, toying with her fork, while Alvin kept eating as though nothing had happened.

Norman glanced at their father to gauge his reaction. Dad's stony expression was hard to read at first, as he sat quietly for several seconds. Then, with deep wrinkles across his forehead, he looked over at Mom and said, "Elsie, I am sorry you were *umgerennt* by Susan's question about the meatloaf being better than Rosa's, but I don't think she meant anything hurtful by it."

Her brows furrowed. "She shouldn't have been bragging. It's not right to be full of *hochmut*, and I don't understand why you feel the need to defend her."

"I am not defending Susan. I just don't believe she was being prideful." He paused for a moment. "But I think we ought to change the subject now, don't you?" Dad's deepened tone of voice let Norman, and probably everyone else at the table, know that as the head of this house, he wanted the subject to be changed.

Norman didn't like it when there was tension at the table, especially when it involved the topic of Rosa. Unfortunately, that had become a common occurrence since his sister's disappearance. *If we could just find her, this would all be over*, he thought. *I think tomorrow, during my lunch hour, I'll make a trip over to the harness shop and have another talk with Ephraim. If he knows anything about Rosa's whereabouts and I press him hard enough, he'll finally cave in and tell me everything he knows.*

When Rosa had first disappeared, Norman had even questioned Susan and Tena to see if Rosa might have confided anything about plans to leave home or maybe made contact with them after she'd gone missing. They'd both said no, but then that wasn't surprising, since Rosa had never been that close to either of her sisters.

Norman munched on the last of his tender, sweet-smelling steamed carrots and gulped down the rest of his water. *If I don't get anywhere with Ephraim this time, the next person on my list will be Rosa's friend Ada. And I won't stop asking until I get some solid answers.*



CHAPTER 2

Allensville, Pennsylvania

RIVULETS OF SWEAT ROLLED OFF Norman's forehead and dripped onto his warm cheeks. He'd hired Dave Hansen to bring him here, only to discover from a note on the door that the Peights' harness shop was closed for lunch. Since Dave had dropped him off and gone to run a few errands of his own, Norman was stuck waiting in the sun, which today was much too hot for the month of October.

"Why can't Ephraim and his daed eat the noon meal inside their place of business, like Dad, Susan, and I normally do at our Meat and Cheese store?" he muttered, leaning against the hitching rail and wishing he hadn't told his driver to come back for him in half an hour. Norman didn't relish the idea of waiting here not knowing when or if Ephraim and his dad would be back. Leaving without seeing Rosa's boyfriend and getting some answers didn't sit well with him either. If Norman waited until Ephraim and his father returned to the shop, he might end up returning to the Meat and Cheese store way past his own lunch hour, which wouldn't please his dad. Norman's father was all about being punctual and taking the things they did at the store seriously. It was good not to sluff off on the job, but Norman thought Dad should ease up a bit and not expect so much from his employees—especially since they were his grown children.

If I ever have kids of my own, Norman thought, I hope I'll be a bit

more understanding and not set such rigid high standards.

Norman glanced around, hoping for a shady place to stand. There really was none, so he removed his straw hat and fanned his face with the brim. It didn't help much, and he peered down the road to see if Dave's van might be in sight yet. There was no sign of him, so Norman began to pace, which was something he always did whenever he felt overly anxious. Though he believed it might do so, his worries weren't eased by walking back and forth in front of the harness shop. If anything, the extra movement of his body caused more sweating and a desire for a bottle of water.

Unless I get the chance to speak to Ephraim before Dave shows up, I will need to head back to Belleville, because I am certain that Dad will complain if I'm late, and he'll probably say that I'm not taking my job seriously enough, he contemplated. *Guess I'll have to try speaking to Ephraim later today. Maybe I'll go by his house after I get off work this afternoon. If I don't get any helpful answers from Ephraim, I'll visit Ada on Saturday and question her again.*

Norman rubbed the bridge of his sweaty nose. *If I come back to Allensville before I get Salina for our pizza date this evening, that would be going out of the way, which would likely make me late picking her up.* He lowered his hand and snapped his fingers. *Wait a minute! Unless Salina has her heart set on eating pizza in Belleville, maybe we can have a nice meal at the Heritage Family Restaurant here in Allensville and then go to see Ephraim after we eat. Jah, that makes better sense.*

Sometimes, when Norman felt that he had too much on his shoulders, he had a hard time making decisions. Right now was one of those times, as he tried to figure out what time he and Salina should eat supper and wondered whether she would mind if they stopped by the Peights' house this evening. Surely his sweet girlfriend wouldn't object, knowing how frustrated and sorrowful he and his family had been since Rosa's disappearance. If Norman had decided to cancel the

date with Salina, that would be one thing, but this way they would be able to accomplish both things.

Norman's thoughts came to a halt when his driver's van pulled up near the harness shop. "You ready to head back to the Meat and Cheese store?" Dave called through his open window.

Norman climbed into the passenger's side. "Yeah. The harness shop is closed for lunch, and Ephraim isn't here right now, so this trip was for nothing. Sorry I wasted your time."

"It wasn't a waste for me." Dave smiled. "I made two stops on Main Street—one to Hildebrand Motor Company to order a part I need for the van and the other was to mail a package at the post office."

"At least one of us benefited from the trip here." Norman reached toward the button that controlled the air-conditioning. "Mind if I turn this up a bit? I'm overheated right now from waiting out there in the sun."

"No problem." After Dave pulled out onto the main road, he looked over at Norman and said, "Since you Amish have no air-conditioning in your homes, I'm kinda surprised the heat bothers you so much. Figured you'd find plenty of ways to deal with it."

"I can manage most of the time, as long as I can locate a shady spot and don't have to stand out in the direct sun too long." Norman pushed the AC button and leaned closer to the vent pushing cool air out. When the frigid air brushed his skin, a sense of relief washed over him. He felt better already—at least physically. Emotionally, Norman was still a wreck, and he'd concluded that he might always be if his sister was never found. Norman was almost certain that Rosa's boyfriend or Ada knew something they had chosen not to share, and he aimed to find out what it was. If not today, then soon.



Belleville

Salina Swarey gazed out the living room window, hoping to see

Norman's horse and buggy pull in, but there was no sign of him yet. Salina was hungry and craved pizza, so she hoped he wouldn't be late.

The schoolhouse where she taught the older grades had been busier than normal today, and she hadn't eaten much for lunch. Instead, Salina had spent most of her lunch hour getting after Norman's brother, Alvin, who'd been teasing some of the girls. *That boy can sure be a handful at times.* She shook her head. *Makes me wonder what kind of shenanigans he pulls at home and how his poor mother copes with him when he misbehaves.*

Salina knew full well that Elsie Petersheim had been a ball of nerves since Rosa's disappearance. It was a wonder she hadn't collapsed with the weight of it all. She couldn't imagine what it would be like for Elsie to have no idea whether her daughter was dead or alive. It had to be on her mind all of the time. When Norman's mother was asleep at night, she probably dreamed about Rosa. During waking hours, Elsie most likely thought about her missing daughter whenever she walked by her bedroom or saw something that reminded her of Rosa. Even seeing Rosa's horse, Daisy, had to be difficult. It was a wonder they had kept the mare, what with Rosa having been gone so long. *But then,* Salina reasoned, *maybe keeping the horse and seeing it every day is comforting to Elsie and the rest of Norman's family. It might give them hope that Rosa will return to claim her horse again someday.*

Salina was aware that Norman was very concerned about his sister's disappearance. For three whole months, he had been spending a good deal of his free time asking questions and searching for her. He'd even gone to the library and used one of its computers to see if he could locate Rosa. *His father, being the strict man that he is, would probably not approve of Norman using social media to look for his sister. It's no wonder he's kept quiet about it and only mentioned it to me,* Salina mused. *I bet Mahlon would change his mind if Norman succeeded in finding Rosa via the internet. That would be a joyous day for all of Rosa's family.*

Salina sighed. *I wish Rosa had already been found. Norman's job at*

his father's store keeps him busy enough, but thanks to him spending a lot of his free time trying to find Rosa, I don't see him nearly as much as I used to. I know it's selfish, but I feel a bit neglected. I'm even beginning to have doubts about how serious Norman is about me and whether there is any chance that we might have a future together.

When the steady *clip-clop* of a horse's hooves interrupted her thoughts, Salina murmured, "Finally."

It stressed her out when she thought too much about the ordeal the Petersheim family was enduring. Salina wished there was something she could do to help ease their pain and frustration. Perhaps the time she and Norman spent together at supper would drive away negative thoughts for both of them—at least for a little while.

"Your boyfriend's here." Salina's sixteen-year-old sister, Christy, stepped up beside Salina and gave her a nudge.

"I know. I see him pulling up to the hitching rail right now." Salina turned away from the window and picked up her shawl from the chair where she'd laid it. "Tell the rest of the family I said goodbye. I don't want to keep Norman waiting, so I'm heading out now." She opened the front door and hurried outside before Christy could offer a response.

Norman grinned when Salina climbed into his buggy. "Sorry I'm a few minutes late. I got home later than usual this afternoon, and it took me longer than I'd planned to shower and change into clean clothes."

"It's okay. You're here now—that's all that matters." She reached across the seat and touched his arm. "I'm *hungerich* and more than ready for some pizza. How 'bout you?"

"I'm hungry too, but I was thinking it might be nice to eat supper tonight at the Heritage Family Restaurant in Allensville. Their buffet items come with soup, salad, and dessert, you know, so I'm sure we won't leave there with empty stomachs." He chuckled and thumped his belly.

"That's true, but you'd said you wanted pizza."

Norman tucked a wayward tuft of hair behind his ear. "I did, but